An Impromptu Model



By ZONA GALE.

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HAT a place for a picnic!" Etheldreda said, drawing rein.
"Picnic?" Linnie questioned fatuously. Linnie was four, and his feet hardly overhung the edge of the phaetonHe had a wholly maddening way of saying over, earnestly and piercingly, some one word of what had gone before.

nat had gone before.
"A .ittle clearing with buttercups around," Eth-"And there is a path. Nobody eldreda said. knows where it goes. And where it goes is the only thing about a path that doesn't matter. We might have a picnic, Linnie, if we had something

"Cookie?" Linnie suggested politely, and went down in the pocket of his round-about and brought up eight or nine crumbs.

Etheldreda was looking across the clearing and

"Linnie," she said, "shall we tie Itty Bitty Colty and go explore?'

The child threw himself headlong from the And Etheldreda, interpreting, alighted and tied Itty Bitty Colty, which also being interpreted ant Little Bit of a Colt, and was Linnie's name for the pony; but they usually called him the I. B.

"'A' go' wear no hat," announced Linnie, casting his sailor into the phaeton. "Aw gone hat."

"Neither will I," Etheldreda assented, and Linnie In his little heart he loved her because Etheldreda was deliciously likely to agree with him. Aunt Cecil would certainly have said: "Indeed you are. Pick up your hat and put it on-at once, He folded his hand about two of her fingers, and hopped joyously beside her, suspe m those two fingers, at each hop, as much of his own weight as was possible.

"Stand just where you are, please!" called a

That voice-it was a disconcertingly peremptory roice, with no little modifying uplifts of intonation to reassure the hearer. It was not, certainly, an unpleasant voice. It had a ring of authority that was magnetic, as is all true authority. (Or is not, if you believe the other way.) It was, in ber in cloth-of-green and green-laced doublet-oh, a voice of a robber in a wood-

he stood still obediently and instinctively, and Linnie gave a gasp of dreadful joy, and clung about her skirts. The sun which fell upon her hair was also in her eyes and dazzled her. But up the lane of light along which the voice had come she divined a man under a butternut tree.

"Just as you are, please—what a thought to bring the child!" he said.

Then she saw the easel and checked her laugh. Not that she would have laughed at a robber, either; but the easel made the situation even more grave. One can run from a robber; one can hardly run from an artist, even if one wished. And with the sun falling gloriously through the leaves of the wood, in a morning of spring, why should one run at all?

'It isn't the light I wanted," said the Artist, "but it's a most bully light."
Under a divided tree whose trunk curved out-

ard in the perfect half of a Gothic arch, she stood quietly, her heart beating just pleasantly enough not to beat any harder. And the dress that had made Linnie happy and the bright hair that he was not tall enough to see were manifestly not missed

by the Artist.
"By Jove!" he said once, softly, up at the other end of the lane of light.

Then Linnie took courage. Nobody who is not four knows the tragedy of being motionless. He oked up at Etheldreda doubtfully, one eye show-

'Keep the child as he was, please!" said the robber-voice sharply; "keep him quiet if you can."

Etheldreda spoke under her breath.

"Linnie," she said, "do you care to drive Itty Bitty Colty home? All the way?"

Linnie took courage, and hopped.
"Dear," Etheldreda promised, "stand still until

I tell you. Per-fectly still, and you shall."
"Itty Bitty Colty?" he pressed her suspiciously.
"All the way." Etheldreda repeated firmly. For answer the one eye disappeared, and Linnie

snuggled his cheek against her blue skirt. The skirt was very sweet to smell, just as the air was sweet whenever she kissed him. Linnie fixed that e eye on a nodding harebell at the foot of another butternut tree, and fell very quiet.

time," the Artist said.

or oars about for the handling.

He had come softly along the soft path, quite as

not mind that because one was rewarded

-blond beard, blue eyes and big brown capable

if the path were in the conspiracy. She looked up

at him-a long way it was to look, too, but one

Which means that the Artist was very good to look

hands, delicate enough hands, too, but looking as if

they painted when there happened to be no swords

Etheldreda said: "I'm not tired, thank you,"

and it was a bit dangerous now, so that her heart beat as if it knew how to beat ever so little harder,

For he would know in a minute that she was not

the model for whom he had inexplicably taken her.

told her; "I'm no end glad to get you to pose for

me-no end obliged to you, and to Mr. Winchell

for telling me about you. And if you get tired you

Etheldreda saw, no doubt at all that he took her

for some unknown model whom some unknown Mr.

It was then that the path, having done its mad-

dest, relented and proved itself a friend in con-For from its infinite resources it sud-

denly did the most natural thing in the world; it

Instantly the Artist was on one knee, holding out a finger. And Etheldreda turned to Linnie,

His eyes were quite impersonal, and there was,

must let me know, please. I'm sure to forget.

"You mustn't let me tire you, you know," he

It took the Artist an unconscionable time. A er would, in the exercise of his profession, have been much quicker. And every three or four minutes, for full twenty minutes, Linnie wriggled distressingly or doubled up one fat knee or lost his balance outright. But Etheldreda stood quite still, with mirth and misgiving in her heart.

And when Linnie wriggled: "The I. B. C. all the way," she kept saying, softly, to him. "And you may ride him to pasture, dear. And we'll have a picnic to-morrow," she recklessly piled up the usury, "if you'll only stand still."

"A picnic to-morrow, with a cake with nuts on," Etheldreda whispered when he showed signs of

An' nuts in all through?" he inquired hoarsely. "All through," Etheldreda continued steadfastly, 'An' a false face? An' a live mud-turtle with a long string in? An, an' a buzz beetle-"

"No!" said Etheldreda as sternly as one may speak below one's breath, with an Artist so near one in a lane of light. "No. And now you are Linnie Little-Boy. You are not Linnie-Man at all."

With a painful catch of recollection Linnie subsided. How were you to remember to be a man in

And then, by the mercy of heaven, the Artist

Will you rest a little now?" he said. "I shall not need the child again, this morning. But I would

like a few minutes more with you, if you please." Etheldreda moved a little away, hesitated, and sat down on a log. It would have been easy—so asy to slip into the wood and run away. Easy, and yet too difficult to do. Also it is difficult to belie one's spirit for adventure.

"Now he ain't lookin'," squeaked Lighie help-

"Linnie Little-Boy wants to run home?" Ethel-dreda was therefore constrained to ask severely. "Oh, well," said Linnie loftily, "I do' mean now. mean after now.'

'Ah, quite so." Etheldreda assented, and watched him lovingly as he pottered about at ferns.

"I'm afraid I've kept you standing a frightful

rooting about among the fern, and he saw and 'came running tip-toe.
"He's Winchell's rabbit," the Artist explained,

'and he's so tame I think he's sugar.'

"Tame sugar?" Linnie repeated, and went down in the pocket of his round-about and brought up his eight or nine crumbs. Whatever they may have been the rabbit understood them and nibbled gratefully away.

scattering more crumbs, scrambled softly backward on the ground, the rabbit jerkily following, wriggling its nervous little nose. They saw its pink fewel eyes sending startled glances toward them and then away to the gloom of the wood, as if for "Are you too tired to pose again?" he asked

"Are you too tired to pose again?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, I—no!" said Etheldreda. "But Linnie. I'm afraid the child—"

"Come, then!" he commanded her briefly, "come! And call the child. We'll give him Winchell's rabbit, to keep. Call him, please, and get him to stand for a moment."

With the promise of Winchell's rabbit for his own, Linnie stood still as if he, too, had been made of sugar. it was as if the dream of possessing the small creature had made him "Linnie-Man." And when at last they released him:

"I been bein' a bush," he explained, with a gentle sigh. "Aw gone bush!" he cried joyously.
"I'm a antelope now. Want to see me wun?"

It had been a wonderful half-hour for Etheldreda, from which Linnie's zoological emerging hardly aroused her. But this the Artist did effectually.

ually.

"If you will stand still again to-morrow," he said gravely, to Linnie, "you shall have a new hutch for him besides. I know a man who will make one.

Will you?"

Linnie squeaked with the certainty of his intention to do so. And the Artist said gravely to Etheldreda:

"You will come to-morrow, you know, at the same hour—you and the child. But will you try, please, to come on the hour? You were very late this morning. I lost the light I really wanted."

Then Etheldreda murmured something, caught at Linnie's hand, and was off precipitately down the path to the road.

path to the road.

To Linnie's amazement, when they reached the clearing of buttercups, Etheldreda caught him in her arms and kissed him.

"That," said she, "was an adventure, blessed

"Aunt Cecil," Etheldreda asked that day, "whe has the lodge?" Miss Cecil made her lips in a little straight line while she braided her embroidery stlks. "An artist," said she, to whom an artist was an

"An artist," said she, to whom an artist was an artist.

"What artist, dear?" asked Etheldreda, to whom an artist was an artist, or not. She went on making a house of cards for Linnie.

"His name is Moberly—John Moberly," Miss Cecil said, in a tone like another straight line.

"Moberly!" Etheldreda repeated—and her voice was always a thing of soft curves that Miss Cecil did not hear, so it was no wonder that Miss Cecil did not hear them now.

"Moberly," Miss Cecil assented. "Linnie, pick up your cards." Then she saw the girl's eyes lifted with something that unaccountably held her own.

"What of that?" she inquired crisply.

"Only that Mr. Moberly is a tremendously famous man, you know," Etheldreda said slowly.

"No." Miss Cecil said, "I did not know. I pay no attention to values that are likely to be pronounced false by the next generation. Linnie pick up your cards."

"Cards?" waid Linnie pleasantly, building on.

nounced false by the next generation. Linnie pick up your cards."
"Cards?" said Linnie pleasantly, building on.
"At once, Linfield!" said Miss Cecil. "Auntie does try so hard. There's a Mr. Joseph Winchell in the lodge, too," she volunteered. "He really took it first. But he is away now."
"Joseph Winchell!" said Etheldreda. "I met him in Rome. Oh!" she said, "you are sure he is away now?"
"Fortunately yes." said Miss Cecil, and her ob-

"Fortunately, yes," said Miss Cecil, and her ob-rious ratisfaction was entirely reflected in Ethel-dreda's face. "He has been away for some days."
"Aw gone, Mr. Winchell," observed Linnie ab-

"Aw gone, Mr. Winchell," observed Linnie absently.

"Linfield!" said Miss Cecil to him a little severely. "Pray be quiet,child."

Linnie looked thoughtfully at Etheldreda.

"Keep chiie quiet?' he quoted gravely. "Keep chile quiet 'f you tan?" Like man said—"

Etheldreda toppled the house of cards to earth. "Linnie," she said, breathlessly, "perhaps—perhaps Aunt Cecil will let us have tea in the garden.

A plenie tea!"

"Picnic." corrected Linnie severely, "to-morrow. Picnic to-morrow?"

Picnic corrected limits seet siy, to morrow. Picnic to-morrow?"

Etheldreda took him in her arms.
"Dear," she coaxed, "let's have the picnic this afternoon, and not go to-morrow morning at all. Wouldn't that be better? To have the cake with puts in now?"

nuts in now?"

Linnie thought it over and decided as all the world decides, (Or does not, if it believes the other

way.)
"Yes, now," he said.

There were the butternut trees, the ten o'clock sun, and a light of spring. There was one tree whose divided trunk curved outward in the half of a perfect Gothic arch. In was a little at one side of that arch that Etheldreda had stood yesterday, and Moberly walking up and down a certain lane of light, could reconstruct the picture she had made. She was perfect in that setting, he said over, and he was, among mortals, the lucky mortal, paramount. On which, with a frown, he snapped his watch on the obvious information that she was twenty minutes late, and the light was going like water. She was not quite perfect, then, it seemed. Though, ff you cannot have beauty and the infallible spirit of promptness too, Moberly redected that he was, of all men, the last to prefer the infallible spirit. But Winchell was due to be flected that he was, or all men, the last to preter the infallible spirit. But Winchell was due to be back that day, and it would be annoyingly like him to arrive at any minute. It had been fine of Winchell to get such a model for him, although, he reflected, what had the man meant by suggesting that she was the one for the Holland things he was doing? Holland! She was Italy; she was Spain; she was of a world that never was—

Ah, and she was here. Moberly saw someone coming up the lane of light, fast being laid with half-after-ten shadows. But she had not brought the child. And—good heavens! she had worn another frock. He would have thought, he would have sworn that she was above that.

have sworn that she was above that.

Came then a hesitating voice, lifted to conquer some distance yet between them.

"Good morning, Mister-r Moberly. I'm sure I do beg your pardon, but I guess I am quite a little late."

Moberly stared. She had on something black and white, in checks, and she had a nice little face, resolutely suggesting a Dutch winged cap. She seemed in a kind of pleasant consternation, and she caught picturesquely at the folds of her skirt. But Moberly would have none of her.

"What is this about?" he inquired briefly—Winchell had told him it was his rudeness that had got him a reputation.

chell had told him it was his rudeness that had got him a reputation.

"Why. I'm Sophie Vron," said the black-and-white checks, advancing. "Mother thought I'd ought to come yesterday, and I was quite sure it was to-day, and Mr. Winchell was away, so I couldn't ask him whether—"

Moberly broke in masterfully.

"Mr. Winchell isn't here—he isn't here," he explained, "and I have an engagement at once. At once. I'm waiting for my model now."

The little Dutch face was grave, and firm in its own understanding.

"Oh," said Etheldreds, "yes, yes."
She rose, and the brightness of her hair and the sun on her blue dress must have dazzled the Artist as they were wont to dazzle Linnie, At all events the Artist looked at her as if he were looking at her for the first time.

own understanding.
"I guess I'm the model," she said, "if you're Mr.

Moberly. Mr. Winchell sent me. Mother thinks he meant yesterday, but I think he meant to-day. For a moment Moberly looked at her. Then:

"Here," he said, "is something for your trouble.
Come back next week, please. You will do admirably then. To-day I've already an engagement."
But even before she had disappeared, Moberly

knew that he had no engagement. All at once the horrible truth was upon him. He stared helplessly at the sketch he had begun yesterday, breaking into a slow smile that was never finished and that left him frowning into the Gothic butternut tree.

"Whom," said Moberly tensely, "whom was I sketching yesterday?"

Nobody answered that. And in a moment Mob-erly laughed a little, as a man will laugh at a very delicious memory that nothing can change. But even as he laughed, Winchell's white rabbit ran out from a tree-hole, and he remembered how he had last seen it. And when, an hour or more later, Winchell arrived from his train, and came whistling through the fern, Moberly still sat there, criminally idle in that light of spring. But he fell upon Winchell eagerly.

That model you promised to send me," he said;

what was her name?"
"Vron," said Winchell brightly, "Sophie Vron. Nice little thing, I thought, for some of your Dutch

'No, no," Moberly said, "I mean the other. Who was the other?"

Winchell stared. And Moberly nodded to his sketch. Barely suggested, but instinct with life as the very shadow of Etheldreda, was the witnessing

work that he had done yesterday.
"Do you know who that is?" Moberly demanded. 'It was she who came. And I thought-

Winchell looked, and then, like a brute, he

'Dear man." he said, "that, I am certain will be Miss Cecil. Yes. Miss Etheldreda Cecil. This is her lodge, these are her acres, you is her house, to which she has just come home. I met her once. in the Pincian Gardens. One doesn't forget her,

you know. Did you actually—"

But Moberly never heard the rest. And what
he said was, one would have thought, about the last thing that a man, at such a time, would say. "Winchell," he begged, "oh, Winchell, please, will you give me your little white rabbit?"

"Picnic?" Linnie inquired expectantly next mornng.

We had our picnic yesterday, in the garden, you

know," Etheldreda reminded him firmly.

"'Nother picnic?" mentioned Linnie politely.

"Ah, well," said Etheldreda, "it is a wonderful morning, Linnie—though you don't alteracher understand that. But we will go guite in the other

The other direction led, after many an affair of hill-tops against blue, and double rows of sweet hedges, and fields rugged under their green, to the Narrowest Road in the World. Or it must have been nearly so, for it was a very narrow road. And on either side was an arrangement of dogwood that looked as if it had been massed a-pur pose, with a pleasant grove at the back. And no-body knew what he could be doing there, still criminally idle in such a light of spring, but straight before them, coming toward them with all his might, was Moberly. Whereupon Etheldreda little, quite as if the Narrowest Road in the Wor I were not in the conspiracy.

Bu. Linnie had recognized.
"'Airs 'at man," he began loudly. "Now, air's 'at man-

"Linnie, Linnie," Etheldreda said very softly. "Take the lines. Now drive Itty Bitty Colty for me, all alone. Please-please. As fast as you like,

But Linnie's attention was not to be bought He took the lines indeed, as he was asked to do, but he pulled on them with all his small strength, so that the I. B. C. stopped short. And then Linnie

"Man, man, are you dot my wabbit?" Anyway, Moberly had seen her. He was beside the step in an instant, and he did not once look at Linnie. He laid his hand on the low dash-board, and he looked at Etheldreda.

'Why didn't you tell me?" he said.

For all answer, Etheldreda blushed like a rose. to stand still, and I think I was so surprised that I did, and afterward-But afterward she had known, and Moberly had

not known. And she must needs feel the moment of her explanation to be as black as possible.
"I—apologize," she said faintly.
"Apologize," Moberly repeated gently. "You—

On which she looked at him briefly, and they

both laughed a little—Etheldreda ruefully and Moberly very joyously. And the I. B. C. turned his head in a contented questioning, and Linnie suddenly laughed, too, as a child will laugh.
"'At wabbit?" he reminded everyone mildly.

Moberly was splendidly prompt

"I'll bring that rabbit to you this afternoon," he said eagerly—but still he did not look at Linnie. "The rabbit and the hutch. May I?" he asked, 'this afternoon, early?"

And Etheldreda said:

"Linnie and I will be at home."

The I. B. C. trotted on—his ears may have been bipted and his eyes may have been wise, but he berly yet stood in the Narrowest Road in the the phaeton, Linnie was meditatively observing:

But this time Etheldreda, who was smiling, did not agree with him. "No," she said, "I don't think so. Oh, Linnle

Next Week, "A Strange Obsession," By Silson Young.

reassurance. Back among the ferns Etheldreda

and the Artist could hear the child softly talking

"Sometimes I'vé an idea." said Etheldreda ab-

The Artist looked at her quickly.
"I haven't a doubt of it," he said. "Why not?

"Jove," said the Artist, "that's what I'll make

At which Etheldreda was silent, forgetting the mere novelty of the moment in its sudden signifi-

"Do you see," he went on, but much as if he had

"Do you see," he went on, but much as if he had forgotten all about her, "I shall call it "The Mother." I decided that when I saw the child—but I meant it all to lie in the mother's face—vision, secret wisdom, peace—all that the child hasn't got. But the child—now I will make the child see what the mother never suspects. A lamp under the fern—or say that they were both standing in a Fairy Ring—"

You see things in the woods that he doesn't see,

Yes," Etheldreda assented.

'You see it?" he said.

"Yes." she answered.

to the little thing, like a question and like an an-

ruptly, "that he sees things in the wood that the

IT WAS A KIND OF ROBBER-VOICE

you know.

the picture.'